CHAPTER IV

DIVISIONS AND FOREIGN INVASIONS FRO!// THE CLOSE OF THE HAN TO THE BEGINNING OF THE SUI DYNASTY (A.D. 220-589)

INTRODUCTORY

WITH the end of the Han began a period of civil strife, internal division, and weakness which lasted for almost four centuries. Non-Chinese peoples on the northern and western frontiers took advantage of the dissensions among the possessors of the fertile and wealthy valleys to the east and south and invaded the land, sometimes setting up kingdoms which lasted for long periods. The administrative structure erected by the Ch'in and the Han could not be operated for the entire country, and, where preserved, was often much weakened. The cultural unity achieved by them was also threatened. Foreign influences, especially Buddhism, wrought striking modifications in the life of the country. When, at the close of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century, the Empire once more was brought together under one ruling house, Chinese civilization had become something rather different from what it had been under the Han.

In many ways the experience of these years resembles that through which the Occident, and, especially, the Mediterranean world was then passing. In both regions were political disunion and foreign invasions. In each, important cultural changes were in progress. Between the two great movements an actual connecting link existed in the vast migrations of

peoples which characterized them both: it was from Central Asia that some (although by no means all) of the wave which overwhelmed large portions of the Chinese and Roman Empires seems to have originated. The suggestion has been made, indeed, that common climatic changes lie back of them—a prolonged period of scanty